

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

The President's News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico

May 19, 2010

President Obama. Good afternoon. *Buenas tardes.* I want to again welcome President Calderon to the White House. And Michelle and I are delighted to be hosting the President and First Lady Margarita Zavala and their delegation for this state visit, and we're looking forward to returning the hospitality—the wonderful hospitality that we received in Mexico when we have our state dinner this evening.

I've often said that in our interconnected world, where nations and peoples are linked like never before, both the promise and perils of our time are shared. Nowhere is this clearer than among the neighbors the United States and Mexico.

The trade and tourism between us creates jobs and prosperity for both our peoples. When a flu spreads, or an earthquake strikes, or cartels threaten innocent people, it affects lives on both sides of our common border. When our neighbors are in need, whether in Honduras or in Haiti, we respond together. And when we expand partnerships between our people, it forges connections that leads to greater prosperity and opportunity for decades to come.

In pursuit of our shared future, I have a true partner in President Calderon. We've worked together in Mexico City and Guadalajara, in Washington and Pittsburgh, in London and L'Aquila. And when he speaks before a joint session of Congress tomorrow, I believe the American people will see what I see: They'll see a leader who is guiding his country through very difficult times with vision and with courage, and he has been an outstanding partner to me and an outstanding partner to the United States.

Indeed, our progress today marks another step forward in a new era of cooperation and partnership between our countries, a partnership based on mutual interests, mutual respect, and mutual responsibility.

We agreed to continue working aggressively on our highest economic priority, which is creating jobs for our people. Mexico is one of our largest trading partners, with trade that supports countless jobs here in America and in Mexico. And because 80 percent of the trade passes over our land border, we reaffirmed our commitment to a 21st century border that is modern, secure, and efficient. And we're directing our Governments to develop an action plan to move in this direction, because our shared border must be an engine, and not a brake, on our economic growth.

To create jobs and increase our competitiveness in the global economy, we agreed to streamline regulations and strengthen the protection of intellectual property. We agreed to continue working with our G-20 partners to encourage that global economic growth is balanced and sustained, especially as we approach next month's Toronto summit. And as the United States works to increase our exports and the jobs that come with it, we'll be working closely with our partners in Mexico, which is one of the largest markets for American exports.

To create clean energy jobs and industries of the future, we're building on a partnership we launched last year with new initiatives to promote regional renewable energy markets, green buildings, and smart grid technology. These initiatives will also help us implement the commitments we made at Copenhagen, especially as we work toward the climate conference in

Cancun later this year. And let me say that, as a leader in cutting greenhouse gas emissions and in helping developing countries do the same, Mexico's leadership under President Calderon has been and will be critical.

For the sake of our shared prosperity and security, we discussed the need for immigration that is orderly and safe, and we acknowledged that both our countries have responsibilities. President Calderon is working hard to create jobs so that more Mexicans see a future of opportunity in their country.

To fix our broken immigration system, I reaffirmed my deep commitment to working with Congress in a bipartisan way to pass comprehensive immigration reform. And comprehensive reform means accountability for everybody: Government that is accountable for securing the border; businesses being held accountable when they exploit workers; people who break the law by breaching our borders being held accountable by paying taxes and a penalty and getting right with the law before they can earn their citizenship. We've been working hard to get this done. There's a strong proposal in the Senate, based on a bipartisan framework, and it can and should move forward.

Now, we also discussed the new law in Arizona, which is a misdirected effort, a misdirected expression of frustration over our broken immigration system, and which has raised concerns in both our countries. Today I want every American to know my administration has devoted unprecedented resources in personnel and technology to securing our border. Illegal immigration is down, not up, and we will continue to do what's necessary to secure our shared border.

And I want everyone, American and Mexican, to know my administration is taking a very close look at the Arizona law. We're examining any implications, especially for civil rights, because in the United States of America, no law-abiding person—be they an American citizen, a legal immigrant, or a visitor or tourist from Mexico—should ever be subject to suspicion simply because of what they look like.

President Calderon and I also reaffirmed our commitment to stand together against the drug cartels that have unleashed horrific violence in so many communities. Mr. President, you and the Mexican people have shown great resolve in a fight for the security and safety of your country. And as I've pledged to you before, Mexico can count on the United States as a full partner in this effort.

As your partner, we'll give you the support you need to prevail. Through increased law enforcement on our side of the border, we're putting unprecedented pressure on those who traffic in drugs, guns, and people. We're working to stem the southbound flow of American guns and money, which is why, for the first time, we are now screening 100 percent of southbound rail cargo. And guided by our new National Drug Control Strategy, we're bringing new approaches to reducing the demand for drugs in our country.

As regional partners, the President and I discussed the situation in Honduras and the need for continued cooperation to support the people of Haiti as they recover and they rebuild. And as global partners, and given Mexico's seat on the U.N. Security Council, we agreed on the need for Iran to uphold its international obligations or face increased sanctions and pressure, including U.N. sanctions. And I'm pleased that we've reached an agreement with our P-5-plus-1 partners on a strong resolution that we now have shared with our Security Council partners.

Finally, I'm proud that we're expanding exchanges between our college and university students and launching a new exchange program for our high school students. I'd note that it

was a Mexican student at an American university who went on to become the President who stands next to me today. And with these exchanges we'll bring together the next generation of American and Mexican leaders.

This is the progress that we've made today. It's progress that calls to mind a Mexican proverb that I am told says, "Tell me who you walk with, and I will tell you who you are." Mr. President, the United States is proud to walk with Mexico. And through our work, we're reminded again of who we are, which is two neighbors, two partners bound by a common vision of prosperity and security for both our people.

President Calderon.

President Calderon. Thank you, President.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the media, good afternoon. First of all, I would like to thank the kind invitation of the people and the Government of the United States to carry out this visit. And I am the bearer of a respectful and affectionate greeting of the Mexican people to this Nation, which is our neighbor and friend. I would like to thank the words and the hospitality of President Barack Obama.

The United States and Mexico are nations that trade, dialog, and complement each other economically and mutually. We are nations that have a political understanding of the highest level. And we are also countries with a fruitful dynamic and ties between people, communities, public and private institutions throughout 3,000 kilometers of border. Our relationship is characterized by an honest and open dialog based on trust, respect, and coresponsibility.

As it has been stated by President Obama, this morning we held a broad and fruitful dialog. We've reviewed our bilateral relationships: the problems, the challenges, and also the many opportunities that we face. We analyzed different proposals and visions on the side of Mexico and the United States to strengthen North America as a region.

We talked about the relevance of solving our differences and trade problems in the fastest possible way. We covered the border topics, such as security, migration, and we also examined initiatives to consolidate our cooperation in global scenarios and global interests.

I can highlight here that the areas where we agree are broader than our differences. There's a broad convergence of interest. And this is not only given to the fact that we share common goals, but there is a will in both of us to turn the fact of being neighbors into a partnership that will act as a leveler for shared development.

Fortunately, the serious economic global crisis is giving up. This opens up a window of opportunity for Canada, the United States, and Mexico to reposition Mexico and North America as a vigorous region, competitive and prosperous, capable of generating more and better jobs, a region that will be attractive for investments, trade exchange, and tourism, with great perspectives facing the future.

Together, we should increase our exporting capacity in a contest of growing competitiveness among different regions of the world. We talked about the different obstacles that are there for complying with transportation obligations that have been established at NAFTA, a situation that impacts jobs, companies, and consumers in Mexico and in the United States. And we shall work in order to achieve a quick solution, with a constructive, creative solution in the long term, in this and many other areas.

As the President has stated, we gave special attention to the border matters. The border is not only a place of encounter for both our nations, but it's also an area of opportunity for our aspirations that we share regarding development. For this we will allocate more resources for the border infrastructure in order that it will be at the height of the needs of our economies and communities, and that it will benefit both sides of the border. We will strengthen the coordination among the government officials on both sides of the border to reinforce security.

We want to make this quite clear: We, both countries, want to have a safe border, a safe border for our people. We agreed upon the urgency of reinforce the actions to stop the flow of drugs, weapons, and cash. And for this we will work with full abidance to the legislations and jurisdictions of each country in a coresponsible way.

In reference to the migratory issue, I acknowledge the sensitivity and the commitment of President Obama to look for a comprehensive solution that will be respectful of the rights of the individuals and will be adjusting itself in a realistic way to the needs of both our economies. We talked openly about this and other issues.

We identified that the economies of our countries are clearly complementing each other, and when we—integrating them, they are a powerful tool to bring productivity and competitiveness up within the whole region. Greater competitiveness in North America means more jobs and better living conditions for the people of the United States and for the people of Mexico.

In Mexico, we are and will continue being respectful of the internal policies of the United States and its legitimate right to establish, in accordance to its Constitution, whatever laws it approves. But we will retain our firm rejection to criminalize migration so that people that work and provide things to this Nation will be treated as criminals. And we oppose firmly the S.B. 1070 Arizona law given in fair principles that are partial and discriminatory.

This and other issues were covered during this meeting, which I will dare to say that it's historic given the level of understanding and trust that we have reached.

For the meantime, I would just like to highlight this open and honest and constructive dialog that we keep and hold with the President of—with the Government of President Obama and these two countries that allows me to see the strength and leadership of the President of the United States.

Thank you, President Obama, for your hospitality. I want to thank all of you for your kind attention.

President Obama. Okay, we've got time for one question each. I'm going to call on Lourdes [Lourdes Meluza] from Univision.

Q. [Inaudible]

President Obama. Why don't you wait for the microphone so we can hear you.

Arizona's Illegal Immigration Enforcement Legislation/Immigration Reform/U.S. Border Security

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. President Calderon called again the Arizona law discriminatory; you have called it misdirected. Do you agree with him? What impact do you think that this law could have on the U.S.-Mexico relations, the prospect for immigration reform, and the lives of millions of Mexican Americans in this country? And what actions did you tell President Calderon that you would follow in the following days and weeks.

President Obama. I think the Arizona law has the potential of being applied in a discriminatory fashion. Now, after it was initially passed, the Arizona legislature amended it and said that this should not be carried out in a discriminatory way. But I think a fair reading of the language of the statute indicates that it gives the possibility of individuals who are deemed suspicious of being illegal immigrants from being harassed or arrested. And the judgments that are going to be made in applying this law are troublesome.

Now, what I've directed my Justice Department to do is to look very carefully at the language of this law to see whether it comports both with our core values and existing legal standards, as well as the fact that the Federal Government is ultimately the one charged with immigration policy. And I expect to get a final report back from the Justice Department soon, at which point we'll make some decisions in terms of how we are going to address that law.

Now, what I've also said, though, is that the Arizona law, I think, expresses some of the frustrations that the American people have had in not fixing a broken immigration system and, frankly, the failures of the Federal Government to get this done. I'm sympathetic to those frustrations. I share those frustrations, which is why, from the time that I was a U.S. Senator through the time that I ran for President, until now, I have consistently said that I'm supportive of a comprehensive immigration reform approach.

And I think the majority of American people are open to a comprehensive immigration reform approach, which would say the following things: Number one, that the Federal Government takes its responsibilities for securing our border seriously. And as I just stated in my opening remarks, we have actually put more resources, more personnel on the borders, and illegal immigration is actually down on the borders, not up. I know that's not the perception out there, but that's the fact.

But we haven't done enough. So we've got a responsibility to create an orderly border, and that's something that we have to do not unilaterally, but also working with the Mexican Government, because there are enormous flows of trade and tourists and people along the border region. The economies are interdependent, and we've got to control the borders, but do so in a way that does not have an adverse impact on the economies of those regions.

The second thing we've got to do is we've got to make sure that businesses are following the rules and are not actively recruiting undocumented workers so that they don't have to abide by overtime laws, they don't have to abide by minimum wage laws, they don't have to abide by worker safety laws and otherwise undercut basic worker protections that exist. And they have to be held accountable and responsible.

The third thing we have to do is to make sure that those who have come to this country illegally are held accountable. And that means they need to pay a fine, they need to pay back-taxes. I believe they should learn English. I believe that it is important for them to get to the back of the line and not in the front, but that we create a pathway so that they have an opportunity, if they are following the rules, following the law, to become legal residents and ultimately citizens of this country.

Now, that kind of package in which everybody has responsibilities I think is one that can pass. And it is one that I am fully supportive of. And I've said this again and again. And I think if we get that done, then you will be less likely to see the kinds of measures that we saw in Arizona.

Here's the challenge that we have politically. The political challenge is, is that I have confidence that I can get the majority of Democrats, both in the House and the Senate, to

support a piece of legislation of the sort that I just described. But I don't have 60 votes in the Senate. I've got to have some support from Republicans. When we made an effort of this sort a few years ago, it was under the leadership of John McCain and Ted Kennedy. And because there was a bipartisan effort, we were actually able to generate a majority of votes in the Senate. And we just missed being able to get it done in the House.

If we can recreate that atmosphere—I don't expect to get every Republican vote, but I need some help in order to get it done. And there have been people who have expressed an interest. But if they're willing to come forward and get a working group and get this moving, I'm actually confident that we can get it done. And the American people, including the people of Arizona, are going to prefer that the Federal Government takes responsibility and does what it's supposed to do.

And it's my job to work with Members of Congress to see that happen. And it's also my job to work with the Mexican Government to make sure that it happens, because President Calderon recognizes that he has responsibilities on his side of the border as well.

And the last point I'll make on this topic is this: I think all of us recognize that some of the pressures with respect to immigration just arise out of economics. People in Mexico are looking for opportunity, and they feel that they can make more money here in the United States. What we also have to recognize—and I talked about this with President Calderon—is every nation also has the right to secure its borders and make orderly decisions about who comes in and who comes out.

And the key here is for us to keep both principles in mind, that people want to find a better life where they can, and if they have opportunity in America, they're going to want to come here. We can't just try to use force to prevent that. On the other hand, the United States has to be able to make determinations about who comes in and who comes out in an orderly fashion. And if we are both a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, then I think we will not only be true to our core values, but we're also going to be creating a more prosperous future for everybody.

Okay.

President Calderon. Radio Formula. Israel has a question.

U.S. Border Security/Mexico-U.S. Drug Control Cooperation

Q. President Obama, there's several issues, but not to detour from this same topic, I would like to know if you have already a strategy planned in regards to the Arizona law, because it is violating the fundamental rights of people. How are you going to turn around this trend, President Obama, that is being shown in different States of the United States against migrants—this migratory reform that you're talking about, to know when it will be taken to Congress and what's the scope that it will have?

The second area regarding security, President Obama, I would like to know, how do you value the battle against organized crime that President Calderon is having? Has this been a success? What is it missing? And following this issue, to know if you have seen that the weapons that illegally cross from the United States to Mexico are the ones that are used by the organized crime people in Mexico? Shouldn't there be an initiative that will regulate guns as they are sold? Is there going to be a ban?

President Obama. [*Inaudible*—a pretty comprehensive answer earlier, so I'm just going to take your second question, and that is the issue of security. This is obviously a shared

concern and is going to require shared effort on the part of both of our nations. I said the first time I met President Calderon and have said ever since that I greatly admire his courage, his dedication, his tenacity in trying to deal with the drug traffickers and cartels that have created such a public safety crisis in many communities within Mexico.

As we pointed out, this is not just an issue of the drug trade, this is an issue of how is it affecting people's day-to-day lives within Mexico. And the Mexican people have an interest in dealing with this. And he has stood up consistently because he recognizes that his foremost job, his most important task as President is to keep the Mexican people safe.

So we are fully supportive of the efforts that he's been making. We have had extensive collaboration over the last several years in making sure that, in a way that respects Mexico's sovereignty, we are responsive to whatever requests are made by the Calderon administration. To the extent that we can help through the Merida Initiative—provide equipment, provide training, provide technologies that can help in these efforts—we have done so. And we will continue to coordinate as effectively as we can with the Calderon administration to make sure that we deal with this problem.

Now, as you point out, this is not just a problem in Mexico. It is a problem that the United States has to address. And the two things that we have to address—and I said this when I was in Mexico, and I will repeat here—it is absolutely true that U.S. demand for drugs helps to drive this public safety crisis within Mexico. And so we've got an obligation not to drive the demand side of the equation. And so most recently we've put forward our new strategy that emphasizes not just enforcement, but also prevention, also treatment so that we can drive down demand and weaken the grip that these drug cartels have.

The second aspect of this that we have to deal with is the southbound flows from the United States of both weapons and cash that helps to empower these drug cartels. And so what I've directed my Department of Homeland Security, ATF, all our various agencies that have responsibilities in these areas to do is to ramp up our efforts at interdicting these southern flows.

And I already mentioned to you, for example, we've now instituted a policy where we are searching 100 percent of rail cargo that's going south. That is a significant investment of law enforcement resources on our part, but it's the right thing to do. We want to crack down on illegal gun dealers who are selling weapons into Mexico. All those are steps that we are doing in coordination with the Calderon Government. And we will continue to emphasize the importance not only to Mexico but also the United States of tackling this problem.

Okay. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 12:20 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. President Calderon and a reporter spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Mexico, President Calderon.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; McCain, John; Obama, Michelle; Zavala Gomez del Campo, Margarita Esther.

Subjects: Arizona : Illegal immigration enforcement legislation; Business and industry : Illegal immigrant labor, reduction efforts; Business and industry : Intellectual property law, strengthening efforts; Civil rights : Minorities :: Racial profiling; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Strengthening efforts; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G–20) nations; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Congress : Bipartisanship; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Interdiction efforts; Education : Foreign exchange programs; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Developing countries, energy sources; Energy : Energy-efficient homes and buildings; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Energy : Infrastructure and grid improvements; Environment : Climate change; Environment : United Nations Climate Change Conference; Haiti : Earthquake, damage and recovery efforts; Honduras : Removal and expulsion of President Zelaya; Immigration and naturalization : Citizenship; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iran : International and U.S. sanctions; Iran : Nuclear weapons and development; Iran : U.N. Security Council sanctions; Law enforcement and crime : Illegal arms trade, reduction efforts; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Mexico : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Crime and narcotrafficking; Mexico : Energy :: Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Mexico : Energy :: Greenhouse gas emissions, reduction; Mexico : Energy cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Illegal immigrants to U.S.; Mexico : Job creation and growth; Mexico : Merida Initiative; Mexico : President; Mexico : Relations with U.S.; Mexico : Student exchanges with U.S.; Mexico : Tourism and commercial travel links with U.S.; Mexico : Trade with U.S.; United Nations : Security Council; White House Office : National Drug Control Policy.

DCPD Number: DCPD201000396.